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SUBJECT: LESOTHO: FRUSTRATED OPPOSITION RALLIES

REF: A) MASERU 577; B) MASERU 500

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On November 4, Lesotho's largest opposition political party, the All Basotho Convention (ABC), led an opposition rally in Maseru at which ABC leader (and former GOL minister) Thomas Thabane highlighted growing frustration with a SADC-led mediation process aimed at resolving a post-election impasse over the allocation of parliamentary seats. While the primary tone of the peaceful ABC rally, which drew several thousand supporters, was one of impatience with the dialogue process, recent comments from Prime Minister Mosisili reflect that the GOL does not view mediation as leading to any changes to the allocation of seats. The impasse, therefore, is likely to linger for the foreseeable future. END SUMMARY.

ABC Rallies

12. (U) Lesotho's opposition political parties, led by the All Basotho Convention (ABC), held a rally on November 4 in part to mark the first anniversary of the All Basotho Convention (ABC) as a political party. Although several thousand party members and supporters participated, attendance appeared lower than previous rallies. The peaceful event featured ABC Leader Thomas Thabane among other speakers and traditional musicians.

13. (U) During his keynote speech, Thabane expressed frustration with stalled SADC mediation efforts in Lesotho, stating that SADC had become a club of leaders devoted to keeping each other in power. (Note: SADC, led by former Botswana President Masire, has engaged in a dialogue process in Lesotho aimed at resolving a protracted dispute over the allocation of seats following the country's February 2007 national election. The dialogue has been on hold for several months, pending resolution of a related court case initially filed by an opposition party. End Note.)

14. (U) At the rally, Thabane also derided recent maneuvers by the Maseru City Council to remove street vendors from urban roadsides; lambasted the Lesotho Defense Force for its role in "abductions" during a curfew in June; alleged that the diplomatic community supported the GOL despite human rights

concerns raised by the opposition; and ridiculed unnamed members of his own party for attempting to sow dissent from within.

"If it Ain't Broke..."

15. (U) At a ceremony on October 29 to mark the opening of construction on Lesotho's new Chinese-financed Parliament building, Prime Minister Mosisili addressed opposition demands to reallocate proportional seats in parliament by stating that Lesotho's mixed member proportional (MMP) system is a well respected model that has served the country well since first implemented in 2002. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it", said Mosisili, intimating that the GOL had no intention of negotiating changes to either the model or to results of the 2007 election, which returned the governing LCD party to power.

Where Will the Frustrations Lead?

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Opposition leaders, including the ABC's Thabane, told several members of the diplomatic corps on November 2 that the political opposition accepts the LCD's election victory and recognizes the governing party's leader, Mosisili, as Lesotho's legitimate Prime Minister. The opposition, however, refuses to accept the allocation of

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parliamentary seats, accusing the GOL of manipulating the MMP model with a dubious party alliance. The dialogue process, even if it resumes, will pit a GOL unwilling to compromise on election results against an opposition, which also formed a similar alliance for the election, dissatisfied with anything short of a revision of seat allocation. In true Lesotho political tradition, the impasse, therefore, is likely to linger for the foreseeable future. END COMMENT.
NOLAN